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Randolph AFB, Texas



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UPDATE: Bush arrives in San Antonio

Web Posted: 09/24/2005 12:23 PM CDT

Gary Martin and Tracy Idell Hamilton
Express-News Staff Writers

President Bush sought to burnish his image as the leader of a massive federal mobilization Saturday – reviewing relief efforts from command centers in Colorado and Texas before arriving in San Antonio hours after Hurricane Rita struck the Gulf Coast.

The president's actions were in sharp contrast to four weeks ago, when he cut short a vacation in Crawford only after Hurricane Katrina decimated coastal communities and flooded New Orleans.

Bush said he was comforted in “knowing that our federal government is well-organized and well-prepared to deal with Rita.” The hurricane left a swath of damage in Texas and Louisiana, but spared Houston, the nation's fourth largest city.

Bush monitored the initial federal response from U.S. Northern Command headquarters at Peterson AFB in Colorado Springs. He later flew to Austin, where rescue and relief efforts were coordinated by federal, state and local authorities. “Nobody asked for these things, but when they come we have a duty,” Bush said at the Austin command post. “I'm really here to let the folks in Texas know that the federal government knows we have a responsibility to support you in the mission of saving lives first and foremost and then helping rebuild their lives,” Bush said.

Bush arrived by Marine One at Randolph AFB Saturday afternoon and remained overnight. He planned to survey relief efforts in San Antonio on Sunday before traveling to Baton Rouge, La., and return to Washington. At Randolph, Bush thanked San Antonio leaders for their compassion.

Mayor Phil Hardberger, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and District Attorney Susan Reed met the president on the air base tarmac. “The city of San Antonio,” Bush said, “you really rose up with great compassion and I cannot thank you enough.” “It made me so proud to be from the state of Texas,” Bush said.

San Antonio leaders were anxious for Bush to tour five evacuation shelters that have housed more than 15,000 survivors of Katrina, which struck Aug. 29, and those recently displaced by Rita, Hardberger said. “It gives us an opportunity to show him how an American city responds to helping its neighbors,” Wolff added. Bush also met with Lt. Gen. Robert Clark, who commands the U.S. Fifth Army at Fort Sam Houston.

Much of the federal relief and rescue effort in Texas is being staged at Fort Sam Houston, where trucks of water, ice, ready-to-eat meals and other necessities were stockpiled on trucks before the storm, and dispatched to troubled areas.

The mass mobilization by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. military eclipsed an effort, widely criticized as being too slow, to Katrina nearly a month ago.

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Bush accepted blame for the inadequate response, which prompted a congressional inquiry. Trying to turn his fortunes, the president flew to Colorado Springs ahead of Rita, scrubbing a Friday visit in San Antonio when first responders with emergency teams were shifted to Houston area as the hurricane tracked east.

As the military responded to the hurricane's fury Saturday, Bush, in shirtsleeves, said he was satisfied with what he had seen. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, praised the federal effort in East Texas, which bore the brunt of the storm, for directing an airlift evacuation of 4,000 medical patients in Beaumont. "I think the communication has worked," Hutchison said on CNN. In Austin, Bush urged Texans to remain off the highways to allow emergency and medical personnel access to hospitals and life-threatening situations.

Bush met with Gov. Rick Perry then toured the Texas Emergency Operations Center, where military and FEMA officials coordinated relief efforts with state and local teams. "The people of the state are counting on you. I know you're working hard and I appreciate the response," Bush said. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Hutchison, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, huddled with the president at the Austin center.

The emergency center at the U.S. Northern Command was established after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks to coordinate the military response to natural and man-made disasters.

Shadowed by the Rocky Mountain front range, the center was a beehive of activity, miles removed from the storm, as officials scurried to direct aid and search and rescue crews along the Gulf Coast.

Eight televisions, interactive maps and charts filled the command center where the president oversaw activities.

Bush met with Adm. Timothy Keating, head of U.S. Northern Command, and received a briefing on the hurricane as it moved inland. During the tour, Bush signed a photograph of himself with a bullhorn, taken at the World Trade Center site in New York in the hours after 9-11. gmartin@express-news.net

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Bush again calls for military to take lead role in disasters

Web Posted: 09/26/2005 12:00 AM CDT

Gary Martin and Tracy Idell Hamilton
Express-News Staff Writers

President Bush wrapped up a tour of hurricane-damaged Texas and Louisiana on Sunday, following a briefing in San Antonio from military leaders who urged him to press for a national search-and-rescue plan.

Amplifying comments he made after Hurricane Katrina, Bush said Congress should consider such a plan, which would give the military the lead role in responding to cataclysmic events in the United States.

"Clearly, in the case of a terrorist attack, that would be the case, but is there a national disaster — of a certain size — that would then enable the Defense Department to become the lead agency in coordinating and leading the response effort?" he asked.

"That's going to be a very important consideration for Congress to think about," Bush said during a briefing by the military's joint Hurricane Rita task force at the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB.

Congress presumably would have to rewrite laws that prevent the military from conducting law enforcement activities and functions on domestic soil.

Bush first signaled his desire for lawmakers to consider the expanded military role during his Sept. 15 speech from Jackson Square in New Orleans.

A national search and rescue plan would have gone a long way in reducing what Maj. Gen. John White called the "train wreck" in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Better coordination would have reduced "simplistic" errors like five helicopters showing up to rescue the same person, as happened in New Orleans, said White, a member of the task force.

White suggested a "national plan that would address the search and rescue at this magnitude."

Lt. Gen. Robert Clark, commander of the U.S. 5th Army and the head of the military response to Rita, agreed, saying a national plan, with training for a faster response, is "the goal."

Bush, in shirtsleeves and looking a bit tired, expressed appreciation for the task force's input.



(William Luther/Express-News)

President Bush boards Air Force One at Randolph AFB in San Antonio before heading to Baton Rouge. The president had stayed here overnight.

Special Section

Hurricane Rita: News, video, multimedia, information for victims and volunteers

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"One of the reasons I've come down here," he said, "is to better understand how the federal government can plan and — to mitigate natural disasters, and I appreciate very much, General, your briefing. This is precisely the kind of information I'll take back to Washington, to help all of us understand we can do a better job in coordinating federal, state and local response."

After the briefing, Bush attended church services at Chapel One, where he was joined by San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and Gen. William Looney III, commander of Air Education and Training Command at Randolph.

The crowd of about 100 parishioners laughed heartily and rose to a standing ovation when a chaplain introduced the president, who had donned a navy blazer and tie for the service.

As the chaplain urged people to greet their neighbors, many took the opportunity to greet the president.

The sermon began appropriately enough with Genesis 10: "after the flooding had subsided."

After the service, Bush rode with Hardberger and Wolff to the tarmac, where Air Force One waited.

The people of San Antonio should be proud, the mayor said the president told him on the ride over, "and he's very proud."

Hardberger has estimated the cost of sheltering evacuees, before Rita, would cost more than \$4 million. Wolff said medical costs incurred by the county would push that figure higher.

Hardberger said Bush told him and Wolff that the federal government would continue to work closely with the city.

"That's as close as we came to talking about money," Hardberger said.

"Mostly when the president talks, you just listen," Hardberger said laughing. "You don't do too much lecturing to the president."

Later, in Baton Rouge, La., Bush met with volunteers at a field office for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The president shook hands with workers who crammed into a vacant department store that has been converted to a command center.

"I'm here to really thank the people in the operations center for their hard work and their dedication to helping the people of Louisiana recover from a second major storm in a very quick period of time," Bush said.

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco appeared with the president.

"We appreciate your support," Blanco said.

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The visit to Louisiana capped a three-day trip that began Friday at the U.S. Northern Command in Colorado.

After monitoring the initial military response, Bush traveled Saturday to Austin and watched recovery efforts at an emergency center there before coming to San Antonio, where he spent the night at Randolph.

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NEW: Bush tells S.A. Mayor the federal government will continue to work closely with city

Web Posted: 09/25/2005 03:06 PM CDT

By Tracy Idell Hamilton
Express-News

President Bush attended an early morning briefing Sunday from members of the Joint Task Force on Hurricane Rita before surprising parishioners at Chapel One on Randolph Air Force Base for 8:30 a.m. services.

Military leaders told the president the U.S. needs a national plan to coordinate search-and-rescue operations following natural disasters or terrorist attacks.

Such a plan would have gone a long way in reducing what task force member, Maj. Gen. John White, called the "train wreck" after Hurricane Katrina.

Better coordination would have reduced "simplistic" errors like five helicopters showing up to rescue the same person, White said.

Bush, wearing shirtsleeves and looking a bit tired, noted that for all the problems in New Orleans, "There were still some amazingly heroic efforts, pulling people off rooftops"

"One of the reasons I've come down here," he said, "is to better understand how the federal government can plan and – to mitigate natural disasters, and I appreciate very much, General, your briefing. This is precisely the kind of information I'll take back to Washington, to help all of us understand we can do a better job in coordinating federal, state and local response."

Bush also questioned whether the Department of Defense should take the lead after such large-scale disasters.

"Clearly, in the case of a terrorist attack, that would be the case, but is there a national disaster – of a certain size – that would then enable the Defense Department to become the lead agency in coordinating and leading the response effort?" he asked. "That's going to be a very important consideration for Congress to think about."

After the briefing, Bush attended service at Chapel One, where he was joined by San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and Gen. William Looney III, commander of Air Education and Training Command at Randolph.

The crowd of about 100 parishioners laughed heartily and rose to a standing ovation when a chaplain introduced the president, who had donned a navy blazer and tie for the service.

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The sermon began with Genesis 10, appropriately enough, “after the flooding had subsided,” noted the chaplain.

After the service, Bush rode to the tarmac where Air Force One waited with Hardberger and Wolff.

The people of San Antonio should be proud, the mayor said the president told him on the ride over, “and he’s very proud.”

Hardberger said Bush told him and Wolff that the federal government would continue to work closely with the city.

“That’s as close as we came to talking about money,” said Hardberger, who has said publicly that he hopes to speed up what is usually a very slow reimbursement process.

“Mostly when the president talks, you just listen,” Hardberger said laughing. “You don’t do too much lecturing to the president.”

Wolff said Bush is also focused on the long - term issues facing Katrina evacuees still in the city, including their mental health needs.

“It was clear that he was very informed about what’s going on in San Antonio,” Wolff said. “He knew we had about 2,000 Katrina evacuees still in a shelter – he even knew about the Saints playing home games here, and the efforts to sell out the stadium.”

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Women eager to document WASP history

Web Posted: 09/25/2005 12:00 AM CDT

Rachel L. Toalson
Express-News Staff Writer

AUSTIN — She'd always felt a flicker of nervousness just before strapping on the seat belt in her B-26 Marauder. The bomber dragged a target behind it and gunners being trained in another plane would shoot at it with live ammunition.

That day at Tyndall Army Air Field in Panama City, Fla., was no different for Deanie Bishop.

But unbeknownst to her, the pilot who flew the B-24 Liberator carrying the gunners, 1st Lt. Bill Parrish, had instructed them to aim close to her plane — so he could meet the cute girl inside.

"That's how I met my husband," recalled Deanie Bishop Parrish, chuckling softly.

The gunners put several holes in the Marauder's tail. While she planned on giving the ornery lieutenant a piece of her mind, they ended up falling in love and were married until his death in 1993.

Parrish spent 14 months in the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP, joining women from all over the country at Avenger Field in Sweetwater to learn to fly Army aircraft during World War II.

Out of the 25,000 women who applied, only 1,830 were accepted into training and only 1,074 earned their silver wings.

Formed because of the Army Air Corps' desperation for more pilots after severe U.S. losses, WASP conducted training missions and ferried aircraft, freeing up male pilots for combat.

Parrish grew up in Avon Park, Fla., a tiny town about 90 miles south of Orlando. There she learned to fly.

She signed up for lessons at the age of 19, enthralled by the flying stories of "good-looking" aviation instructors who would cash their checks at the bank where she worked.

"I thought, just because I'm a girl, why can't I learn how to fly?" Parrish said. "The airplane doesn't care."

She still recalls the day she realized she'd make a good pilot. She was climbing, flying solo for the first time, and the control stick broke off in her hands.

Her fingertips barely able to reach the lever in the instructor's empty seat in front of her, Parrish leveled the plane, climbed into the other seat — and found a sign that read, "Do not fly solo from the front seat."

Parrish said she made a "fairly decent landing.

"I have never forgotten that," Parrish said. "I always knew that, no matter what kind of trouble I got into, I had the right stuff to do it. I never doubted for one minute that I could fly anything that anybody else could fly."

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The day she turned 21, she sent in her WASP application, reporting for duty Nov. 1, 1943.

"It was a time when America needed us," Parrish said. "Every American did whatever they could do best to help the country. I was not unusual."

Parrish earned her wings after 70 hours of instruction spanning seven months. Her first assignment was as an engineering test pilot at Greenville Army Air Field in Mississippi. There, she flew newly repaired planes to make sure they were safe enough for male cadets to fly.

She then became a tow target pilot, serving until the WASP organization was ceremoniously disbanded in December 1944.

At war's end, the pilots' records were classified and stored, and they were denied veteran status for 35 years.

"We were just women," Parrish said. "Once the men came home, they said, 'Goodbye, we're going to take your jobs.' We just hung up our parachutes and paid our way back home."

The remains of 38 WASP pilots who died during World War II were returned in pine boxes at their family's expense, Parrish said. Many times, she said, the women would raise the money to send the bodies home.

Parrish and her daughter, Nancy, have traveled to 19 states to interview more than 100 WASP, capturing the interviews on digital videotape.

"These are extraordinary and inspirational individuals who happen to be pilots," Nancy Parrish said. "Their stories are all so much bigger than life."

Housed at Baylor University, the tapes are destined for a WASP museum that Nancy Parrish hopes to build in Sweetwater as part of Wings Across America, a Waco-based organization that preserves WASP history. It can be reached at (254) 710-7202. A temporary museum in a hangar at Avenger Field is open weekends.

"It's one of those things that, if you don't capture it now, it's going to be too late," Deanie Parrish said. "And it's not only important to hear their stories, but to look in the eyes of the person who's telling the story. Then you can catch the spirit behind them. That's what these videotapes do."



(Courtesy photo)

Deanie Parrish, a member of Women Airforce Service Pilots during WWII, began flying at 19.

Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)

- Created in 1943 from the merger of Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) and Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS)
- Not part of the U.S. military, but pilots got same training as male Army Air Force cadets
- Flew 78 types of aircraft, every plane flown by the Army Air Force; flew only within the continental United States
- 38 WASP died in service
- Disbanded in December 1944
- President Carter signed law in 1977 to grant the WASP veteran status

Sources: www.wasp-wwii.org and www.twu.edu/wasp/wasp_facts.htm;

Compiled by News Researcher Julie Domel

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Local military set to aid Rita victims

BY MITCH MEADOR
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Fort Sill, Altus Air Force Base and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are all poised to deal with whatever destruction Hurricane Rita may bring.

Fort Sill is preparing to send a brigade-sized element of approximately 1,000 soldiers to serve in what's called Task Force Thunder, said Col. Gary Agron, commander of 214th Fires Brigade and the task force.

Some 750 of the soldiers will be from Fort Sill, with the remainder from Fort Hood, Texas, Agron said. The plan is to meet the Fort Hood soldiers somewhere in Texas and move to a staging area north of where the devastation occurs. Task Force Thunder will then go wherever the joint task force tells it to go, he said.

"It's all dependent on Hurricane Rita. Where we go depends on where it goes," Agron said.

As of Friday, the brigade had only warning orders, not marching orders. The Fort Sill soldiers expect to be leaving sometime this weekend. While awaiting word from the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Defense, they busied themselves by carrying out pre-command checks, pre-command inspections, looking at equipment and making preparations to carry out recovery, relief and rescue operations.

"We're doing mess support, getting mobile kitchen trailers," said Agron, adding that soldiers were being briefed on how they should go about picking up refuse.

One battalion of 214th Fires



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Brigade is serving in Iraq — 3rd Battalion, 13th Field Artillery. The remainder is here as a strategic hedge or Quick Reaction Force, Agron said. They are trained for everything from warfare to humanitarian assistance, and Agron said they have done humanitarian assistance before, in the wake of Hurricane Andrew as well as Katrina.

Instead of the launchers and cannons they would take with them to a war zone, they'll convoy lots of trucks, humvees and equipment.

Maj. David Lee, acting commander of 1st Battalion, 14th Field Artillery while Lt. Col. Randall K. Cheeseborough is deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, said his battalion will take over 100 wheeled vehicles. Part of getting ready for the trip is removing the communications equipment from the command post trucks — the M1068s — and loading it into the wheeled vehicles.

"We're taking primarily M998 humvees, 5-ton cargo trucks and the M985 Heavy Equipment Mobility Tactical Trucks (HEMTTs)," Lee said.

One of the soldiers who was loading up equipment Friday in the motor pool area of 1-14 FA is from Houston. Pvt. 1st Class Kenta White was born in Huntsville, Texas, but he lived in Houston for 16 years before he entered the military.

White graduated from Yates High School in southside Houston's 3rd Ward and attended the University of Texas at Austin for a year and a half before joining the Army two years ago. He went through both basic and advanced individual training at Fort Sill and is now a fire direction control specialist in Headquarters and Headquarters Service Battery, 1st Battalion, 14th Field Artillery.

His family lives about an hour and a half from Port Arthur, Texas, the town expected to bear the brunt of Hurricane Rita. His mother and father, two brothers, a sister and a nephew all live in Houston. He said he has not had a chance to talk with them since news of the hurricane broke. He does know, however, that his sister and one brother have evacuated, but his father refused to leave.

What are White's thoughts about going into his home territory after a hurricane has struck?

"It's my job. I do what the unit tells me to do. But I'm kind of glad to be going down there. It's a way to see what's happening," he said.

It's also a way to be a constructive part of cleaning up and helping rebuild the devastated area.

"That's what needs to be done," White said.

Altus Air Force Base was notified at 6 a.m. Friday that six C-17 Loadmasters from the 97th Air Mobility Wing



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were needed as part of the Hurricane Rita tasking, said Michael Fletcher, a public affairs specialist for the wing.

The first plane left Altus at 7:50 a.m., he said. The C-17s were to meet up at Kelly Field on Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas.

Aircraft from across the entire military are participating in the evacuation of people from the Beaumont, Texas, and nearby Port Arthur region, Fletcher said. The planes are landing at Beaumont and Lake Charles, La., another area threatened by Hurricane Rita. How many each craft can bring out depends on the configuration of the seating; recently, one airplane transported 200 students to Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas.

In another development, the Air Force has issued a stop movement order for people moving to a new base that could potentially be affected by a hurricane. This prevents them moving to a hazardous area, Fletcher said.

Fish and Wildlife help

Also, nine U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service personnel from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge left Friday morning for the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge northwest of Austin, Texas, Refuge Manager Sam Waldstein said.

There, they were to link up with a team of 32 Fish & Wildlife workers as-

signed to help in the Hurricane Rita relief effort. All are from Oklahoma except for one from the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge south of Lake Texoma, Waldstein said.

Nine Fish & Wildlife law enforcement people are going as a separate group, he said. The law enforcement personnel come from all over the region, which includes Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Waldstein said the group that left here Friday took two tractor-trailers with big front-end loaders, Bobcats, plastic material for putting on temporary roofing, a lot of MREs (Meals, Ready to Eat), bottled water and generators.

"They'll stay just as long as they're needed, but the minimum will proba-

bly be for 14 days," the refuge manager said, adding that they will move from Austin to wherever the need is greatest.

Various skill groups were tapped for the mission.

"We needed mechanics, radio operators/coordinators, EMTs. So it was the fire crew, maintenance, law enforcement people. We also took people who were chainsaw-qualified, so we



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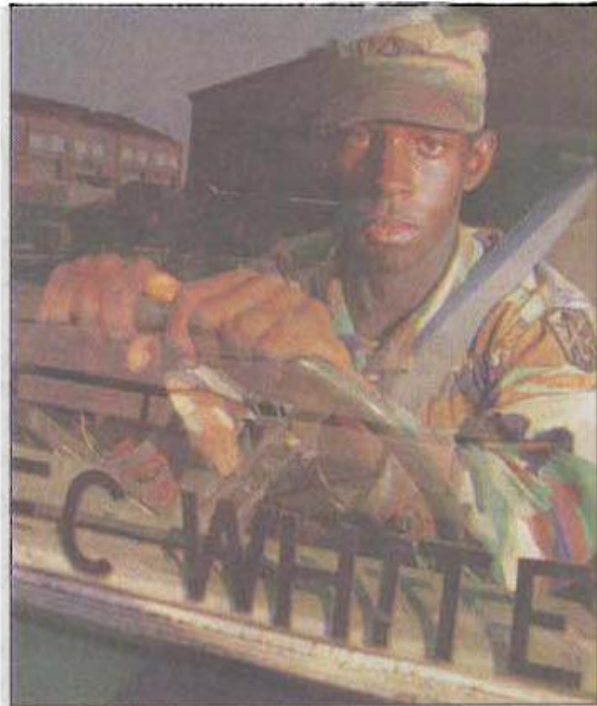
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could cut trees and open up any roads that were blocked. That's so we could get access for other emergency services that come in after, with supplies in the bigger trucks," Waldstein said.

Waldstein said the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge sent people to help after Hurricane Katrina but it was much later because nobody requested any assistance.

"We had one law enforcement officer and two people who basically transported Native American crews down there, dropped them off, and turned around and came back," he said.

A press release from the Oklahoma City Veterans Administration Medical Center says that facility was slated to receive 39 patients evacuated from the VA Medical Center in Houston on Friday. On Thursday, approximately 100 patients from community hospitals in the Beaumont area were flown to the Will Rogers Air National Guard Base. They were disseminated to local National Disaster Medical System-participating hospitals.



MICHAEL D. POPE/STAFF

Pvt. 1st Class Kenta White, a Houston resident whose family lives an hour and a half from where Hurricane Rita is expected to make landfall, will be one of the drivers in a convoy of Fort Sill soldiers going there this weekend to assist in relief operations.



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MICHAEL D. POPE/STAFF

Spec. 4 Juan Abeita of Albuquerque, N.M., gets ready to load trucks for Task Force Thunder on Friday in the motor pool area of 1st Battalion, 14th Field Artillery.